

SUMMARY AND QUOTES FROM  
JUDGE WEBSTER'S REMARKS TO  
WHITE HOUSE FELLOWS

6 JANUARY 1988

"I don't currently have a White House Fellow (at the Agency). The transition stage didn't lend itself to that."

"We had very good success with Fellows who served in the FBI."

"Probably our best approach is asking what you would like to talk about. I'd like to keep the filibuster to a minimum so that we can have a dialogue. Are you most interested in what the Agency does, or the implications of the Iran-contra affair, or on efforts to deal with secrecy in an open society?"

"I should have brought my button that says: "My job is so secret that even I don't know what I am doing." (good laugh)

White House Fellow: Would you mind talking a bit about the secrecy issue?

"First, you have to put secrecy in perspective. Our mission is to gather intelligence, primarily the collection of intelligence, the analysis of intelligence, which is determining what the facts mean, and the preparation of intelligence estimates that will be useful to the policymaker in making wise judgments -- that is fundamentally what we do. We are not policymakers, we don't make policy."

"And we are also involved in the small area known as covert action, in which we implement the foreign policy of this country."

"In the process of gathering intelligence, we not only have the clandestine service which collects human intelligence, or HUMINT; we also have signals intelligence (messages, communications, and other types of emissions that equipment gives off) and imagery intelligence (satellites in the sky and pictures). This is all very useful politically, economically, and militarily."

"In the process of developing our ability to get this type of information, there are two words that are sacrosanct in our field -- sources and methods."

"If we cannot protect our sources, we won't be able to develop intelligence. If we cannot protect the methods and techniques -- satellites, etc. -- if we give them up by describing them -- we will lose them, because countermeasures can be developed to defeat them.

"Secrecy is the answer -- it's the only answer -- to protect sources and methods."

"So you say, 'What do we do about that?' The answer, to me, is very clear: We protect them. You realize there is a place in an open society for secrecy, but you also make us accountable in ways we can live with."

"We have various laws -- the Intelligence Oversight Act and others -- under which Congress asserts oversight responsibilities. In the House and Senate, there are the select committees on intelligence. A good deal of effort is made to provide secure rooms in Congress so important issues can be discussed and documents can be reviewed. In this way, the committees act as surrogates. Surrogates for the Congress as a whole, surrogates for the American people to look at what we are doing -- to see that we are doing it within the constraints that have been established. Applying the resources where they should be applied, and not doing things that we should not be doing -- without the loss of sources or methods. It's not just a question of losing lives, though that's very much a part of it. It is the ability to continue to develop equipment and methods that will work and not be rendered useless because someone has blown them purposefully or inadvertently."

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White House Fellow: Question on Iran-contra affair.

"I approached this whole business with two cardinal theses as an outgrowth of my experience on the bench and the FBI. We must carry out our activities with absolute fidelity to the Constitution. Obviously, the things we do will come up against local laws in the rest of the world. If we followed every local law, we would be out of business. But there is no excuse for ignoring our own laws. There is never any excuse for deception inside the Agency and there is never any excuse for deception to the Congress."

"(Disciplinary actions) are painful and unpleasant. But we cannot function without the trust and confidence of the American people. The quickest way to lose that trust is to allow people to make their own rules, or to deceive."

"I approached the issue of discipline on the basis of whether anyone broke existing rules and instructions which were clear and understandable. The other (factor) was when they were called to account for what they had done, did they tell the truth to the Inspector General and to the Congress or did they deceive? And on that basis, I applied discipline to seven individuals and commended two for unusual cooperation. Now I'd like to put this behind us with all the lessons we have learned. Internally, that's always tough. People know the people who have been disciplined and know that they meant well. It's hard to see people disciplined. It's especially hard, I suppose, to see people disciplined by someone relatively new to the organization. On the other hand, I have a quarter century of experience in taking disciplinary action..."(inaudible)

"They were not disciplined for doing something they were told to do by a senior official. They were disciplined for not doing what they were told to do, or doing what they were told expressly not to do -- defiance of the regulations."

"The higher (ranking) people were not punished as severely because of what they were punished for. They were punished for lack of candor."

"The important bottom line, as I see it, is that the CIA did not have a systemic problem. It was a problem of individuals who were coopted by people on the NSC who had gone operational and decided to direct paramilitary operations outside the normal covert action process which has built-in protections for the people and the rules. They went around them.

"The institution itself (the CIA) came through well."

On objective intelligence assessments: "The books are never cooked; that's an important part of integrity."

"One consideration as to what led me to ask the President not to be on his Cabinet -- I did not want to be responsible for developing information to support a perspective."

"I have senior review boards -- some non-Agency people who have expertise in particular areas who look over the estimates that are being prepared, and give me reports on whether they think they're on track and whether the information is useful. That's a question I'm always asking: 'Will this be useful to the consumer?'"

"We are not in the business of doing reference work (for consumers). We are in the business of providing intelligence estimates in policy terms.

Discusses Harvard University program -- exploring the impact of intelligence on policy decisions.

"I'm working to develop a better career development system." (not further specified)

On new people coming to Agency -- "I hope we attract Operations people who are risk-takers rather than risk-seekers. People who are dedicated but are responsive to law and discipline, who understand and play by our rules."

"I'd like to see more cross-fertilization. Information may be locked up in one place, while someone in another place is active without the benefit of that knowledge."

On strengthening the Inspector General's Office -- "All those who are seriously interested in senior career management will have to serve in the Inspector General's Office."

On leaks -- "We live in a world where leaking is an art form. We have to keep trying to control leaks and protect classified information."

White House Fellow questions on the Director's "leadership style" and what he has done to get the Agency "back on track"

"I never really had any thirst for publicity. Publicity is helpful in terms of getting your message across. (I) try not to have too large a profile in an organization like ours which is not used to the press."

"We had an internal problem and an external problem. The external problem was dealing with a lot of people in Congress and the Administration and public who had lost trust in the Agency. They were suspicious not only of what we were doing but suspicious of what we were saying we were doing. I had to do things there that didn't undercut the morale and pride and self-motivation of the people in this Agency."

"I have not done as good a job as I would like to in terms of milling around, being readily accessible to talk with people. We are in [redacted] buildings in this town, and I've only been to a few of them."

"There are three ways for a subordinate to look at information with respect to those you report to: 1) The type of things that require getting approval; 2) The type of things that you approve or disapprove yourself and notify your boss; 3) The things you do and don't need to tell the boss.

"The important thing is knowing which of these three categories it (a decision) falls under."

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